

Put it this way, to quote *The Oregonian* editorial staff: "Marriage is sterling. Civil unions are workaday stainless steel" [Feb. 27]. If you want full value, sterling is the standard.

Clearly, the oppression of lesbian and gay couples is not the same as slavery. It is hard to compare the cold darkness of the closet with generations of rape, beatings, economic exploitation, "Jim Crow" and denial of personhood.

Fortunately, our vision of freedom does not ask us to make this comparison. When we pledge allegiance to our nation, we set a single standard for freedom: "with liberty and justice for all." Not liberty only for those who were born

HOLD ON FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Why ask for a scrap when what we deserve is a full place at the banquet table?

by Bonnie Tinker and the Rev. Cecil Charles Prescod

privileged, or held captive for the longest time. Not justice only for those who have been

defined and treated as less than human by our Constitution: "liberty and justice for ALL."

Withholding legal recognition of marriage from lesbian and gay couples is a restriction on our ability to form and sustain families, a restriction on our liberty. Forming families is part of our inalienable right to pursue happiness. It is unjust and begs for correction—social customs, private religious creeds and majority votes notwithstanding.

Our democracy does not hand out rights only to those deemed worthy by the majority. Rather, the majority is granted the right to govern only because they guarantee equal rights for all. The Oregon Constitution, Article 1, Section 20, specifically prohibits laws "granting to any citizen or class of citizens privileges, or immunities, which, upon the same terms, shall not equally belong to all citizens."

Is it possible to pass legislation saying all statutes referring to "marriage" will also include "civil union"? Theoretically, maybe, but in practice, not likely. Civil union by any name establishes the legal difference and isolation of same-sex couples and families. It creates no precedent for extension of marriage rights federally or between

states. Our children would not be fooled. "Marriage" carries the social status, the romance, the cultural respect that will not apply to any second-class status regardless of the name.

Some may find it prudent to accept second-class status to garner some legal family protections. If they throw us a scrap, perhaps we will be hungry enough to take it. But why ask for a scrap when what we deserve is a full place at the banquet table? Let's work for what we want.

This is no time for a hasty compromise that leaves us hungry for justice. This is the time to build on the progress of the elections: 43 percent of Oregonians opposed discrimination. We're almost there—let's repeal Measure 36.

Freedom cannot survive when equality is compromised. Even Beth Robinson, the attorney in the Vermont case, agrees that a separate term "says that you are not quite equal, you're not quite worthy." Why adopt an institution whose sole purpose was to create the appearance of equality while withholding the full value of marriage? Why settle for stainless steel when others are collecting silver dollars?

Civil union prolongs second-class status for first-class families. Gaining full marriage equality won't be quick and it won't be easy, but it is a moral path. It leads toward liberation and justice for all. **J**

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